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ABSTRACT

PARENT TALK is a newsletter distributed to approximately 10,000 recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children in Grand Rapids, Michigan, along with their assistance checks. The newsletter is designed to help parents relate to schools in order to facilitate and promote their children's success. Five topics are discussed: (1) what PARENT TALK is; (2) how PARENT TALK originated; (3) the theoretical background and its importance as related to teacher education; (4) preliminary results of a survey that indicate how PARENT TALK recipients feel about it; and (5) future directions for PARENT TALK. A figure shows representative samples from PARENT TALK dealing with parent-teacher conferences and how to get the most from them; listening skills and ways to encourage good listening habits; and discipline tips. Although the long-term continuation of the project is unknown, response data from recipients indicate that PARENT TALK is a useful tool which has helped link parents and educators for the benefit of children. Four appendices include a PARENT TALK survey, PARENT TALK Issue Topics, a PARENT TALK order form; and a questionnaire to schools and agencies. (LL)

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PARENT TALK: Helping Families Relate to Schools and Facilitate Children's Learning

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Association of Teacher Educators Annual Meeting
February 17, 1992

ED342745

It is a pleasure to share information about **PARENT TALK**. This paper will discuss five topics: (1) what **PARENT TALK** is, (2) how **PARENT TALK** originated, (3) the theoretical background for this project and its importance as related to teacher education, (4) preliminary results that indicate how **PARENT TALK** recipients feel about it, and (5) future directions for **PARENT TALK**.

WHAT IS PARENT TALK?

PARENT TALK is a check-sized newsletter being distributed to almost 10,000 recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in Kent County (Grand Rapids), Michigan along with their assistance checks. This pilot project is being carried out with the help of members of Phi Delta Kappa, students and faculty members at Grand Valley State University, public school educators and the Department of Social Services in Michigan. It is designed to help families relate to schools and help them facilitate their children's learning. Time and energy are both volunteered. Printing costs are born by a District Project Grant for $1,000 from Phi Delta Kappa, a $2,000 grant from the Frey Foundation and a $1,000 grant from the Binda Foundation. Thus, we have $4,000 to print 12,000 copies of each of 24 issues of **PARENT TALK**. In addition to distribution of **PARENT TALK** through the Department of Social Services, master copies have been distributed to area schools for use in school newsletters and to social service agencies that work with children and families. Kent Regional Community Coordinated Child Care also distributes copies of **PARENT TALK** to child care providers and parents seeking information on child care resources.

HOW DID PARENT TALK ORIGINATE?

PARENT TALK has many precursors. However, the primary impetus came as the result of the emphasis Phi Delta Kappa gave to studying and addressing the needs of At-Risk Children during 1988-89. Through a discussion of "At-Risk" children, we realized that the majority of the factors that put a child at risk of failure in school or society are outside the domain of the school and frequently are not even known by the school. This lead us to hold discussions with other area agencies that deal with children and families e.g. the Department of Social Services, Community Education, Department of Corrections, Department of Mental Health, Department of Health, and Child Guidance. Agency and school representatives were asked to present information on and ideas for programs that focus on promoting children's success in life and school.

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One of the ideas that was identified by the Director of Kent County Department of Social Services was that of providing information regarding how to relate to schools or facilitate children's learning to families that frequently do not come to schools for conferences or parent-teacher groups. The Department of Social Services indicated that it was willing to help get information to aid recipients. It was decided to attempt the project by providing information through a check-sized newsletter included in the envelopes with assistance checks sent to area families who receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).

Ideas for issues were developed by education students and faculty, teachers, and administrators. Grants were obtained to support the costs of printing 10,000-12,000 copies of each of the 24 issues to be included with checks to Kent County AFDC recipients during the pilot phase of the project. Some representative samples of these newsletters are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Samples of **PARENT TALK**

PARENT TALK

PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES
WAYS TO GET THE MOST FROM THEM

1. Think about what you want to find out.
2. Prepare some questions to ask the teacher.
   How is my child doing in class?
   Does my child use time well?
   Does my child get along with others?
   Does my child turn in homework?
3. Talk with your child before going to school
   What does he or she thinks the teacher will say?
   What problems may the teacher talk about?
   What areas does your child enjoy?
4. Ask the teacher to explain anything you don't understand
5. Be prepared to talk and listen to the teacher
6. Follow-up on any questions you have or problem areas

PARENT TALK

Phi Delta Kappa 8709

LISTENING
Ways to Encourage Good Listening Habits

- Be a good example. Listen to your child when he or she talks.
- Listen closely as your child talks and asks questions.
- Get your child's attention before starting to talk.
- Use a normal, quiet voice when talking to your child.
- Give short, clear directions.

PARENT TALK

DISCIPLINE TIPS

- LOVE YOUR CHILD - even when you don't like what she or he does
- TELL YOUR CHILD AHEAD OF TIME HOW YOU WANT HIM/HER TO BEHAVE
- MAKE RULES CLEAR AND SIMPLE
- KNOW WHAT IS REASONABLE TO EXPECT OF A CHILD AT EACH AGE LEVEL.
- SET AN EXAMPLE FOR YOUR CHILD.
- CATCH YOUR CHILD BEING GOOD AND PRAISE THE BEHAVIOR.
- BE CONSISTENT. EXPECT THE SAME GOOD BEHAVIOR ALL THE TIME.

POSSIBLE RULES

- BE KIND TO YOURSELF AND OTHERS
- BE A HELPER
- SOLVE PROBLEMS BY TALKING NOT FIGHTING
- SHARE WITH OTHERS
- BE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR OWN THINGS
- CLEAN UP AFTER YOURSELF

WHAT IS THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND FOR THIS PROJECT?

Families contribute extensively to the development and achievement of children (Scott-Jones, 1984). One of the prominent emerging family patterns is the increase in the numbers of economically disadvantaged families with school-aged children, many of whom are children of very young mothers, of single parent families, of minority families, and of families out of work. By cooperating with the Department of Social Services to extend the sphere of the school beyond the school doors, it is hoped that some of the educational needs of children and adults in these families might be addressed.

Christopher Peterson (1992) suggests that "parents have only until age 8 to help steer a child one way or the other" in becoming optimistic or pessimistic about life and their own abilities. He goes on to suggest that parents who want to encourage optimism in their children should strive for consistency in their expectations, rewards and punishments. If parents are inconsistent, it tends to teach children that they cannot believe others. This research could be informative to parents, teachers and child care providers.

The understanding that families play a crucial role in the education of children, provides the basis for this meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators and for the first of the nation's goals (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). The educational goals for the year 2000, as recommended by President Bush and the nation's governors, include goals for having every child ready to learn when they come to school, for reducing the drop-out rate, for increasing student performance and literacy, and for drug free schools. These goals are admirable. However, the schools cannot do the job alone. America 2000 recognizes that families and communities are needed to support children in their learning. Despite the need for educators, families and communities to become united in providing support for the education of children and youth, this is not easy to achieve (Cohen, 1992).

Since educators must reach out to new partners in advocacy for children and their learning, teachers and teacher educators must find new ways to foster communication between teachers, schools, parents and the community. Many models for reaching out to parents and the community have been tried and are being used in communities. School districts are sending newsletters to all residents within the district. School-business partnerships, grandparent programs, homework hotlines, school-community planning groups, and senior lunch programs are just a few of the ways schools are reaching into the community to gain support. Some states, including Michigan, have legislated (PA 25 The Quality Education Act) that schools attempt to increase parent participation in school activities that foster learning, including parent teacher conferences.

The desire to increase interaction with and support of families and communities also was one of the suggestions resulting from the 1989-90 study of pupils at-risk of failure in school or society conducted by members of Phi Delta Kappa throughout the United States (Frymier & Gansneder, 1989). A review of the literature and the factors identified, suggested that a majority of the factors indicating that a child might be considered at-risk of failure, were not school related. When discussing the study, Barber (1989) suggested that educators might better address the problems of children at-risk by getting involved with other agencies in the community which serve children and families to mobilize resources to provide support to children and learning. **PARENT TALK** is an attempt to initiate just such a cooperative effort on behalf of children.

HOW DOES IT RELATE TO TEACHER EDUCATION?

In an evaluation study of teacher preparation programs, first and third year teachers in Colorado (Konecki, 1979) indicated that relating to parents and the community were among the highest areas in which novice teachers felt less than adequately prepared (Figure 2).

Figure 2 **Ratings by Colorado First-Year and Third-Year Teachers of How Well Their Teacher Preparation Programs Prepared Them to DO the following:**

Question Area	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Conduct Parent-Teacher Conferences	3.45	1.07	1292
Aid in Interactions Between Educators and the Community	3.52	0.96	1305
Facilitate Parent-Teacher Cooperation	3.70	1.01	1352
Work with the Exceptional Child in the Regular Classroom	3.72	1.10	1303
Individualize Instruction	3.91	1.05	1338

Rating Scale: 6 - Outstanding 3 - Below Average
5 - Above Average 2 - Inadequate
4 - Adequate 1 - Not Applicable (Responses not used)

These results have been reiterated in other studies of the needs of beginning teachers (Veenman, 1984). In order to meet needs such as these, teacher education institutions, school districts, states and professional organizations have developed numerous induction programs for beginning teachers (Hauling-Austin, 1990).

Not all induction programs, address the areas of parent and community relations. Project CREDIT (Certification Renewal Experiences Designed to Improve Teaching), a teacher induction program conducted by Indiana State University showed significant changes in the 21 interns' skills in six areas including the ability to communicate with parents and with the public (Summers, 1987 cited in Hauling-Austin, 1990).

At Nelson Elementary School in Muskegon, Grand Valley State University, Michigan State University, Muskegon businesses, the neighborhood association, and governmental agencies such as the Department of Social Services, Department of Health, Department of Mental Health, are beginning a pilot project to provide comprehensive support to children and their families. Pre-service students as teacher assistants and student teachers will be placed in this school. In such a setting intensive preparation in working with parents and the community will occur which goes well beyond the initial cooperative endeavors of **PARENT TALK**.

If such a comprehensive program is not available for educating prospective teachers, teacher education institutions may want to consider using a project such as **PARENT TALK**. Students can survey parents to identify areas in which they might like to have more information. The students can then do searches to find out what information is available on the desired topics. (In addition to ERIC and psychology data bases, students may find materials published by the PTA very helpful.) One of the most difficult tasks is to summarize information and write it in a vocabulary that can be understood by all parents. It may be desirable to have topics translated into various languages, as well. Once materials are written, they can be made into a copy ready format using computer graphics and/or word processing programs. Once duplicated, the information can be disseminated. We have been told that the small size of **PARENT TALK** is just right for placing on the refrigerator. Information from recipients may be used to assess the value of the project and to identify areas of future issues.

WHAT DO RECIPIENTS THINK OF **PARENT TALK**:

Evaluating the effectiveness of **PARENT TALK** has been elusive. The initial attempt was to include a mailing address for recipients to send in their questions. To date we have received one letter. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3 **LETTER FROM RECIPIENT**

Dear Sirs,

Im a single dad with sole custody of my 8 yr. old daughter. Im also a full-time student at Jordan College. I recieved your "Parent Talk" card with my 55 check. Im proud of my daughter, but Im still curious about ways to raise her better. The card didnt say anything about where meetings are held, (if they are) or when. What's the deal? Is it a publication, or meetings, or what? Please let me know!

We have sought and received information from professionals regarding its content and have received favorable responses. Suggestions registered by educators, social service agency personnel and policy makers included: making sure the language was not too difficult, finding multicultural graphics, and translating some issues into Spanish. We continue to work on implementing these suggestions.

We tried to find out how to get information from recipients about **PARENT TALK**. After considering numerous options, we were able to have a Michigan Occupational Skills Training (MOST) counselor to collect data at two sites from AFDC recipients who participate in that program. Four sets of data were collected in November from 38 persons and five sets from January 30 - February 13, 1992 from 63 persons. Additional information will be collected in May and August, 1992. Preliminary results are very rewarding. Of the 105 AFDC participants in MOST that were asked to respond to the **PARENT TALK** survey, 101 responded, which is a 96% response rate (Figure 4).

Figure 4 **Respondents to PARENT TALK Evaluation Questionnaire**

101	Persons Responded	- 96 %	Response Rate
5	Persons Did Not Respond	- 4 %	Non-Response Rate

N = 106 Persons in the MOST program were asked to respond

Data collected by a MOST counselor in sessions in November 1991 and January/February 1992

Of those 101 respondents 72 persons (71%) checked that they received **PARENT TALK**, 26 persons (26%) indicated that they did not receive it, while 3 were unsure (Figure 5). Fifty-nine persons indicated that they received it in their checks, 4 indicated they received if from a school, and 6 from a friend, three recipients did not respond to this question.

Figure 5 **Respondents who Received PARENT TALK**

72	Respondents Received PARENT TALK	-	71 %
26	Respondents Did Not Receive PARENT TALK	-	26 %
3	Respondents Did Not Know	-	3 %

N = 101 Questionnaire Respondents

Of the 72 persons who indicated that they had received **PARENT TALK**, 64 (89%) indicated that they read it. Only 8 persons (11%) responded that they did not read it (Figure 6).

Figure 6 **Recipients Who Read PARENT TALK**

64	Persons Who Received PARENT TALK Read It	-	89 %
8	Persons Who Received PARENT TALK Did Not Read It	-	11 %

N = 72 Persons Who Indicated That They Received PARENT TALK

Of the 64 persons who indicated that they both received and read **PARENT TALK**, 53 (83%) checked that the information in **PARENT TALK** was helpful, while 11 persons (17%) indicated that it was not helpful to them (Figure 7).

Figure 7 **Recipients Who Read PARENT TALK and Found It Helpful**

53	Readers found PARENT TALK Helpful	- 83 %
11	Readers did not find it Helpful	- 17 %

N = 64 PARENT TALK Readers

Upon a closer look at the respondents who did not find it helpful, it was observed that a number of the respondents were parents of young children and a majority of the information in the issues of **PARENT TALK** which they received had focused on parents of school aged children e.g. homework, parent-teacher conferences, how to help your child be successful in school. Thirty-eight (38) respondents (Figure 8) had no children of school age (elementary, middle school, or high school).

Figure 8 **Respondents Indicating They Had Children Within the Age Category**

Infants	11 Respondents	7 %
Toddlers	41 Respondents	28 %
Preschoolers	28 Respondents	19 %
Elementary	49 Respondents	33 %
Middle School	12 Respondents	12 %
High School	8 Respondents	5 %

N = 101 Respondents

NOTE: Respondents may have children in more than one category and may have more than one child within a category. Two respondents indicated that they had no children.

Thirty-three (33) respondents in the January/February groups indicated that they had used the information in **PARENT TALK**, seven (7) said that they had not used **PARENT TALK** information. This question was not asked of the November groups. As a result, it cannot be generalized across both groups. The issues the groups in November had received also are likely to be different from those received by the January/February groups. Topics disseminated through the Department of Social Services AFDC assistance checks are listed on Figure 9.

As noted below, **PARENT TALK** is not sent with both checks every month. This occurs because the Department of Social Services frequently must include information about changes in DSS policies and programs. Such information takes precedence over **PARENT TALK**. Since we do not want the inclusion of **PARENT TALK** to require additional postage, it is omitted and rescheduled. Only the first set of twelve topics are listed. Additional topics are yet to be scheduled.

Figure 9 **Sequence of Distribution & Schedule of Evaluation Data Collection**

MONTH	YEAR	CHECK	TITLE
July	1991	2	Children Do Better (Moving)
Sept	1991	2	Parents: the Most Important Teachers
Oct	1991	1	Parent Teacher Conferences
Oct	1991	2	Homework
Nov	1991	1	Things Parents Can Do
	First Evaluation Through MOST Job Club N = 39		
Dec	1991	1	Discipline
Jan	1992	1	Friends
	Second Evaluation Through MOST Job Club N = 66		
Feb	1992	2	Listening
March	92	1	Happy Healthy Children
March	92	2	Child Care
	Additional Topics To Be Decided		
	Third Evaluation Scheduled		
May	92	2	Summer: A Time for Fun and Learning
June	92	1	Summer Reading

Persons who received and did not receive **PARENT TALK** answered the questions as to what type of information could be helpful to them. Information on Child Development was checked by 50 persons; 43 checked information on nutrition, health and safety; 40 checked information on community services; 37 checked information on school; and 32 checked information on play, games, toys (Figure 10).

Figure 10 **Information MOST Respondents Felt Would Be Helpful to Parents**

CATEGORY	NUMBER OF RESPONSES
Play, games, toys	32
Child development	50
School	37
Nutrition, health, safety	43
Community services	40

N = 101 Respondents

NOTE: Respondents could and did check more than one category.

Seventy-three (73) respondents indicated that they thought **PARENT TALK** would be helpful to others and only five (5) persons thought it would not be helpful (Figure 11).

Figure 11 **Respondents Who Thought PARENT TALK Would Be Helpful to Others**

73	Yes	NOTE: Some persons responded favorably to
5	No	this question yet indicated that they
23	No Response	did not receive or read PARENT TALK

Preliminary data suggest that **PARENT TALK** is a useful tool for parents and that they would like to have more information on a variety of topics. Additional data will be collected throughout 1992.

PARENT TALK has been made available to public and parochial schools and social service agencies in Kent County. They have made numerous requests for black and white masters of **PARENT TALK** issues. Some schools plan to use the masters in school newsletters and while others plan to print copies of **PARENT TALK** and distribute them to parents. One school indicated that it would share the information with teachers and two social service agencies said that they would give the information to teen parents.

This project is considered to be an initial attempt to involve educators (university students and faculty, administrators, elementary and secondary teachers, librarians, and social service agencies) and others interested in promoting the success of children and their families to work together. The success of the project will be difficult to fully measure as the long term effect would be in changed parenting behavior. This cannot be measured by questionnaires.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF **PARENT TALK**?

One additional set of 12 issues of **PARENT TALK** will be disseminated through the Department of Social Services in AFDC checks. Packets of information for parents of infants, toddlers, and preschool children will be disseminated through 4C (Kent Regional Community Coordinated Child Care) to parents who are placing their children in child care homes or centers. Packets also will be distributed to providers of child care. These two facets of the **PARENT TALK** project are particularly geared to national goal one: to have children come to school ready to learn. The primary goal to help link parents and educators for the benefit of children has been accomplished for now. To continue the project additional funding sources and volunteer services need to be obtained. Thus, the long term continuation of the project is unknown.

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APPENDIX

I. PARENT TALK Survey

II. PARENT TALK Set One Issue Topics

III. PARENT TALK Order Form

IV. Questionnaire to Schools and Agencies

PARENT TALK SURVEY

Check the ages of your children

___ infant
___ toddler
___ preschooler
___ elementary school
___ middle school or junior high
___ high school

Have you received a copy of PARENT TALK?

___ yes
___ no
___ don't know

How did you receive it?

___ in check
___ from my child's school
___ from a friend

Have you read any PARENT TALK information?

___ yes
___ no

Did you use any of the information? (Not in Nov. Survey)

___ yes
___ no

Was any of the information helpful?

___ yes
___ no

Would PARENT TALK be helpful to parents in other counties?

___ yes
___ no

What type of information would be helpful to you?

___ play, games, toys
___ child development
___ school
___ nutrition, health safety
___ community services

PARENT TALK: Set One Topics

1. PARENTS: The Most Important Teachers Children Have
   PARENT TALK: What is It? How to contact PARENT TALK.
2. SUMMER: A Time for Fun and Learning
   Things Young Children Like to Do. Parent Idea Corner.
3. SUMMER READING. Going to the Library
   Helping Young Children Get Ready to Read
   Tips for Reading Aloud to Young Children
4. DISCIPLINE TIPS. Possible Rules.
   Handling Misbehavior of Young Children
5. FRIENDS: Get to Know Your Child's Friends
   Relationships Between Children, Friends and Parents
   Stopping Friendships
6. LISTENING: Ways to Encourage Good Listening Habits
   What is Listening? Listening Games for Younger Children
7. Children Do Better When Things Are the Same
   Moving Can Cause Problems for Children
   Helping Your Child If You Have to Move
8. Things Parents Can Do to Help a Child Be Successful in School. A Parent's Pledge.
   Do You Want to Go Back to School?
9. PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES: Ways to Get the Most From Them. High School Conferences
   Questions to Ask at Parent-Teacher Conferences
10. HOMEWORK. Facing a Problem at School
11. HAPPY, HEALTHY CHILDREN LEARN BEST
    Ideas for Good Nutrition. Avoiding Colds and the Flu
12. CHILD CARE. Providing Child Care.
    Things You Can Expect from a Child Care Provider
    Things a Child Care Provider Can Expect from YOU

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PARENT TALK: Set One Topics

1. PARENTS: The Most Important Teachers Children Have
   PARENT TALK: What is it? How to contact PARENT TALK.
2. SUMMER: A Time for Fun and Learning
   Things Young Children Like to Do. Parent Idea Corner.
3. SUMMER READING. Going to the Library
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12. CHILD CARE. Providing Child Care.
    Things You Can Expect from a Child Care Provider
    Things a Child Care Provider Can Expect from YOU

QUANTITY & ITEM	PRICE
1 pkg. Masters of Set One (12) Black on White 8 1/2" by 3 2/3"	$ 75.00
35 copies of a single issue (Designate issue # & topic)	10.00
100 copies of a single issue	25.00
250 copies of a single issue	60.00
500 copies of a single issue	100.00
1000 copies of a single issue	150.00

PARENT TALK ORDER FORM — EDUCATOR

NAME _____

SCHOOL _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

SIGNATURE _____

See Reverse Side for List of Issues

QUANTITY	N #	TITLE	PRICE	TOTAL

PARENT TALK--PDK
C/O Loretta Konecki
Grand Valley State University
School of Education, #920
301 West Fulton
Grand Rapids, MI 49504

TOTAL _____

$5.00 BILLING CHARGE _____

AMOUNT ENCLOSED _____

Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery

PHI DELTA KAPPA

Thank you for your interest in PARENT TALK. Your order of issues or masters of set one are enclosed. PARENT TALK includes ideas for parents on how to help children be more successful in school developed by members and friends of Grand Rapids Chapter 1027 of Phi Delta Kappa. We are pleased to provide them to you at no cost. Cost of printing has been supported through grants from the Frey and Binda Foundations.

We would appreciate your help in determining the success of PARENT TALK. Please fill out the form below and return it to Dr. Loretta Konecki, PDK - PARENT TALK Coordinator, Grand Valley State University, 301 W. Fulton, #920, Grand Rapids, MI 49504.

Thank you again for your interest and help.

We plan to use PARENT TALK masters for the following:

____ To include selected ideas in school newsletters.

____ To print copies of PARENT TALK for parents of the children in the school.

____ To share the information with teachers.

____ Other (Please describe)_____

Return to:

Dr. Loretta Konecki, PDK-PARENT TALK Project
Grand Valley State University
301 West Fulton, #920
Grand Rapids, MI 49504